/xix/ Organization of the Book

● 128 In the first chapter of this work we present the myths which form the framework of the religious representations. A deep knowledge of the cosmogony and myths is necessary to understanding the institutions as well as the most current rituals.

The second chapter analyzes the representations, particularly that of Faro, master of the word and holder of life, whose cult is general and who presides at all human activities.

The third chapter approaches the notion of the person and describes in succession the spiritual principles and the body which are dependent upon Faro, then the name, the device, and the taboos which integrate the individual into society. It also examines the dissociation of these various elements at the moment of death.

The fourth chapter summarizes the mechanism of the blood sacrifice, the most important moment of the ritual, which disposes of the elements making up the person as described in the preceding chapter. It also includes the description of the places where the cult is practiced and the original altars of the Bambara.

The fifth chapter deals with the origin, development, and organization of technology such as fishing, hunting, agriculture, weaving, the forge, and pottery, the performance of which is largely ritual in character and which support the religious representations.

The sixth chapter describes individual and family cults as well as those pertaining to the village as a whole. The great religious societies, which group individuals around the altars set up for specific purposes, are also examined. These cults, so different in appearance, bring into play the same representations, and the rituals involve comparable mechanisms of the forces brought into motion.

In the seventh chapter we give a detailed description of a certain number of rituals chosen from the most representative. A predominant place is reserved for those relating more directly to the "person": birth, circumcision /xx/ and excision, initiations, funeral, and ancestor cults. Among others, those concerning refuse, rain, and general rites called "the renewal of the year" are commented upon.

The eighth chapter presents an analysis of several methods of divination which appear as a synthesis of Bambara metaphysics and reflect in very subtle symbolism the entirety of their knowledge.

128 Note: In the following pages, as well as in the foregoing, words in Bambara or other Sudanese dialects which are used are italicized; see Chapter 7 for explanations. [Omitted in translation.]

[7] I. Origin

Name

101 The peoples with whom this work is concerned are known, generally speaking, by the name of Bambara, both to Europeans and to most of the natives. They call themselves Banmana or Bamana.

European writers have offered two theories to explain the etymology of the words Bambara, Banmana and Bamana.

According to one school of thought, the word Bambara derives from bamba or bamma (crocodile) and alludes to a tne (1)

1. A magico-religious taboo, see Chapter 2.

which is reputedly common to all natives known as Bambara. This theory is nullified by the fact that the taboo, which was supposed to be generally imposed, is actually imposed on only a few of the Bambara. Further, the suggested correlation has never been proved to exist between the name of the tne and either individual or collective denomination among the Bambara.

Other authorities suggest that, according to the Banmana themselves, the word Banmana means "rejection of a master" (ban-ma-na) and alludes to the legend which tells how, early in the thirteenth century, the Banmana left their native land and went to Toron in order to escape from the yoke of their Malinké conquerors. This etymology, which is linguistically defensible, would apply only to the people who immigrated to Toron, and it still does not tell us by what name they and their congeners were known before the migration.

614 631 "the people (of the clan) of Massa"; the Segu-n-ka-u (2),

2. From another point of view, Segu-n-ka-u means "the people of the country of Ségou."

"the people (of the clan) of Ségou."

104 128 Since we are always obsessed by our own system of organization, these terms appear in our writings as village (dugu), canton or province (kafu), and empire (ton', which is a clan).

Because of the convenience of expressions that are familiar to us, we shall use this terminology in this study, and it seems essential to define briefly the value of these terms in native society in order to avoid ambiguity which, to say the least, gives rise to distorted delusions.

173 563 631 In Kaarta and the Ségou country before the time of the two great clans whose history we have given and whose development and operation we are about to describe, there were dugu which usually had no connections or at most were joined in some ephemeral kafu. These kafu were composed of a majority of Bambara mixed with Soninké and people of other races. The Soninké dugu were noted for their prosperity, sometimes even wealth, and this gave them a degree of pre-eminence over the Bambara dugu. This prosperity rested on the labor of a slave population that the Soninké had managed to acquire for the most part by commercial dealings.

This de facto hegemony usually had no corresponding political or administrative organization; its only outward sign was the scorn with which the Soninké regarded the less fortunate Bambara and, conversely, the sullen hostility of the Bambara toward the rich Marka (as they called the Soninké). As a consequence, local quarrels broke out from time to time which sometimes developed into bloody conflicts. The early history of the Massa-si clan is a good example of this state of affairs, to judge by the record in the chronicle cited above.

173 631 The Ségou-Kaarta regions, under the authority of Mandé and Songhaï clans, were in this state, in semiobscurity because they were outside the zone of direct administration by these clans.